



4-H'er Darrel Moody visits with his steer after livestock auction.

# Stairway to Heaven

By TEMPLE GRANDIN

*Here's a new look at humane  
slaughter as seen through  
the experience of young 4-H members*

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After devoting months of intense care and love to a steer raised from infancy, 4-H'ers become very attached to their animals. Parting with them at sales time—something they know has to happen, but for which they are not quite prepared—is often a deeply traumatic experience.

As a 4-H leader in Kingman, Ariz., for five years, Billie Hart had watched many youngsters face the problem. She began searching for ways to help the children over the emotional stress of the experience. If youngsters could be convinced there was more to their animals than just meat, she reasoned, perhaps they would be more able to control their feelings of loss when the animals were sold.

One night, as she was casually leafing through a beef cattle book, Hart came across a section on cattle by-products. Wouldn't it be much easier for the children to face the loss of their animals if they knew that insulin for diabetics was one of the vital by-products derived from cattle, she suddenly wondered.



At right, Valerie Roper visits her steer while animals wait in holding pen outside plant. In second photo, Darrel watches as his steer enters Stairway to Heaven. Below, Valerie and Darrel urge animals to enter restrainer to be stunned. "Watching our calves naturally made us cry," Darrel said later, "but I suppose that's only human."

Checking more extensively into the subject, she learned that the pancreas gland from one steer is required to keep a diabetic alive for ten days. But that wasn't all. Hundreds of other pharmaceuticals and other products also contain ingredients derived from cattle by-products. The list included such diverse materials as tires, photo film, steel, soap and, of course, leather.

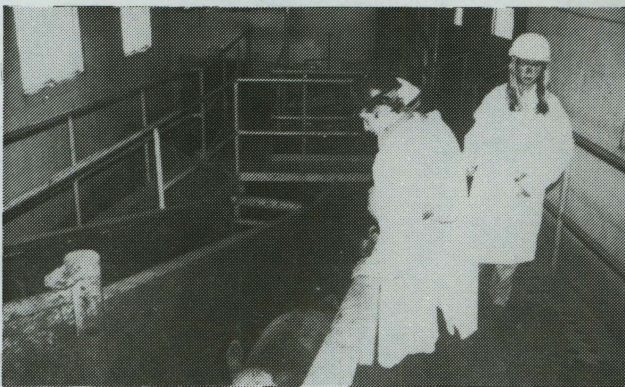
Several months of research followed after that first casual inspiration. Billie Hart and her Herdmaster's 4-H group contacted major meat packers, pharmaceutical companies, scientists, etc., for additional information. As a result of their study, the youngsters compiled an informational exhibit demonstrating the importance of cattle in modern life.

"We realized that meat is just a small part of beef cattle's real value and worth to man," Hart was quoted as saying.

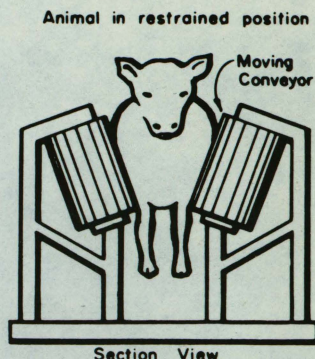
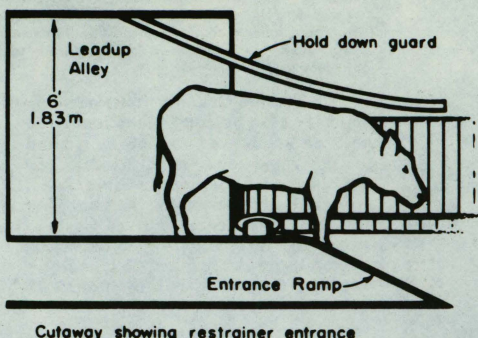
Word of the display project began making the rounds. It was featured at the Arizona State Fair, the National Livestock Show and the Western States Governors' Conference. Television, newspaper and magazine reports brought further attention to the project.

But still, looking at a display is only an educational experience. It's not the hard reality of having *your* steer sold and slaughtered.

The next step in the learning process, concluded Hart, was to make it possible in some way for her youngsters actually to follow their cattle through the processing line







This diagram illustrates operational principle of restraining chute.

for a personal look at the things they had read about while preparing the exhibit.

Recently, Billie Hart was successful in accomplishing even that. Two young people—Darrel Moody and Valerie Roper, members of the Herdmaster's 4-H Club—had the opportunity to follow their own 4-H steers through the Swift Fresh Meats plant in Tolleson, Ariz.

A modern packing plant is an ultra-clean and efficient operation.

The Tolleson facility is no exception, but it does have one unique aspect: the Stairway to Heaven.

The recently installed humane slaughtering system was designed and developed by its builders not only for speed and efficiency, but also to emphasize the utmost importance of treating animals with respect while they are being

processed. Thus, the idealistic name given to the system.

For the two young 4-H'ers, the tour erased the most unpleasant aspects associated with cattle processing.

Both Darrel and Valerie chose to be with their animals when they walked up the ramp so they would be able to comfort them and shelter them from fear.

"I wanted to be with my steer when he was processed," Valerie said, because if I had a friend who was in the hospital dying, I wouldn't go off and leave him."

As the animals walk up the stairway, they are serenaded with music to help keep them calm. They enter a V-shaped, conveyorized, restraining chute with moving sides, somewhat resembling a moving sidewalk.

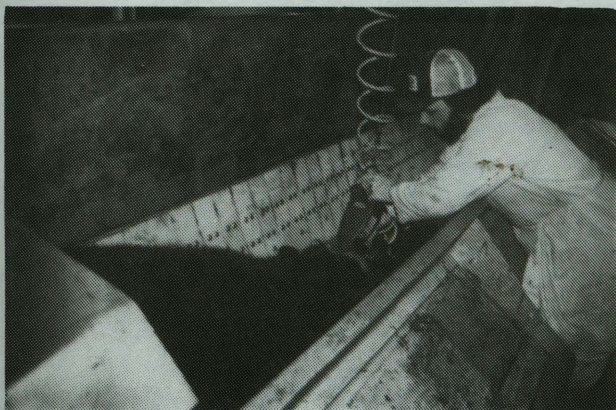
Before the animal realizes what is happening, the conveyors have lifted him up firmly but gently, providing pressure against the entire length of his body, on both sides. While held securely in the restrainer, the animal is rendered instantly unconscious with a captive bolt (percussion) stunner.

After their steers were dispatched and the emotional impact of death overcome by the two young people, both Darrel and Valerie were keenly interested in seeing the remainder of the slaughtering process. They were especially attentive to the pancreas collection operation, the first step in providing insulin for diabetics.

In a modern packing plant, no part of an animal is wasted.

Cattle are humanely stunned with captive bolt tool. Development of this percussion device is credited with speeding progress in passage of 1958 Federal Humane Slaughter Act.

Moyer Packing Co. installed a conveyorized restraining chute in February 1983.





As a nationally recognized authority on cattle handling systems, Temple Grandin was one of the designers of the Stairway to Heaven. She is livestock editor for *Arizona Farmer Ranchman* magazine and consultant to a number of packing plants and equipment manufacturers, including Coral Industries in Phoenix.

Author Temple Grandin (left) accompanied youngsters on packing plant tour. The message below was written by a blind girl and is posted over the installation to emphasize importance of treating animals with respect. In the photo bottom right, Arizona Governor Raul Castro visits with Billie Hart who is credited with developing project to help 4-H'ers overcome trauma of selling animals they raised from calves.



For over an hour, the two youngsters stood on an observation platform over the main processing floor. During that hour, they saw the reality of what—until that time—had only been a display.

Later, after they had returned home, the youngsters expressed their feelings about the experience.

Wrote Darrel: "You helped us understand fully how a calf might actually feel while climbing those last final steps. By us being there and actually watching it, it will help us to help other kids.

"Watching our calves naturally made us cry, but, if we wouldn't cry for the animals that we have cared for and loved for so many months, we wouldn't be human."

He added that, "Just before my steer entered the chute to be stunned, I was petting him. As he

looked up at me, he wasn't saying, 'Help me, get me out of here.' He was saying, 'Thank you, because this is a better place you are sending me to.' And, I really believe this is what they are all thinking.

"With these things in mind—and knowing that the calves are never beaten, kicked or hurt in any way and never feel any pain, it will make it easier for us to sell our steers in the years to come. And I am dedicating myself to telling all 4-H'ers everywhere of my experience and that they have no reason to fear for their animals.

"I would like to say that I personally feel that it was the right decision for us to go to the Stairway to Heaven."

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MEANING OF LIFE AND NOT TO FEAR  
DEATH. WE THROUGH RESPECT FOR  
THESE ANIMALS CAN COME TO RESPECT  
OUR FELLOW MAN AS WELL. *Clara Tester*  
**TOUCH·LISTEN·REMEMBER**

